

EASTERN MONTANA RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
BLM Montana State Office, Billings, Montana
October 30, 2003

Attendance

RAC: Betty Aye, Howard Boggess, Colby Branch, Mack Cole, John Ensign, John Gibson, Becky Kallevig, Robert Lubbers, Neta Old Elk, David Smith, Marty Ulrich.

BLM: David McIlroy, Sandy Brooks, Mark Jacobsen, Mary Apple, Rebecca Makor.

Field Manager Updates

Sandy Brooks, BiFO –

- The Billings Field Office continues to fine tune the OHV Travel Management Plan. This includes working with the public to determine the best way to proceed, although not many public comments received. The proposed areas to begin with are Shepard, Pryor Mountains, Horsethief and Acton. The proposals will go to the State Director for approval to move forward.
- A contractor has been established for the Horsethief Area and treatment of the first 300 acres will be started soon. The purpose of the treatment is to reduce hazardous fuels thereby protecting homes in the area.
- Pompey's Interpretive Center is moving ahead. The exhibits contractor has been hired and the construction contract is ready to be advertised. It looks like ground may be broke in the spring.
- Testing should begin in the next month for the wind energy project. A temporary tower will be put up to see if there is enough wind in the area to support the project. Testing will take approximately one year.
- Seven wild horses were removed from the Pryor Mountains during the last roundup. These horses will be shipped to Nebraska and adopted via internet.
- R.L.F. Bighorn Properties, LLC (Bighorn Properties) and their agent Rocky Mountain Timberlands continues to pursue a road right-of-way in the Grove Creek area, across four segments of public land to provide access to 426 20-acre lots created in the mid-1970's--- before current subdivision laws were enacted. The developer can reach about 60 percent of the parcels without a right-of-way granted from the BLM and has already begun to improve roads on the private lands. The development may have considerable impact on wildlife and grazing and the Grove Creek Block Management Area would eventually be eliminated. The area is also culturally and historically rich with Native American artifacts and sites. The development abuts a high risk wildfire area on the east face of the Beartooth Mountains. Sandy will keep the RAC informed regarding this topic.
- Robert Lubbers gave a brief summary on the shooting range situation. A sub-committee was previously formed. Members of this sub-committee are Bill Kennedy, John Gibson, and Marty Ulrich and Robert Lubbers. The major problems of various shooting ranges and public lands being used for target practice are littering, vandalism, shooting where there are no backdrops, etc. The sub-committee has recruited information and ideas from various other entities such as the Rod and Gun Club, but has come to no concrete solutions.
- Some ideas that have been brought up include developing a self-policing plan or getting people to aid in a self-policing plan, the possibility of making 17-Mile an open range and limiting other sites. The sub-committee does not want to see the shooting ranges closed down, and will continue

to work with others to come up with options to resolve this issue. John Gibson noted the issue has been put in the Billings Rod and Gun Club newsletter, asking the membership for ideas.

David McIlroy, MCFO –

- David noted that 85 wells in 15 different locations have been approved. There are two other applications for Plan of Development on the BLM MCFO web site. These applications are for 8 wells (4 private/4 public) and 14 exploratory wells.
- Hanging Woman Creek could be in the path of future development. BLM has not received an application for development, however, because the drainage is controlled by two major landowners, BLM felt we should attempt to develop a Coordinated Resource Management Plan (David would like to get all stakeholders together to figure out workable solutions for CBNG development). There were approximately 40 people in the facilitated discussions in Sheridan, Wyoming. There were people from diversified areas and agencies. It was a good meeting. Another meeting is scheduled for November 18th in Sheridan. David will expand the mailing list to include the RAC members.
- It was a very busy fire season. The Missouri Breaks Complex Fire consisted of four fires that burned together and burned approximately 130,000 acres BLM/private land. The Miles City office has been meeting with the people in the Jordan area to determine how to make things better for all concerned. It has been an enormous learning process. There were also three fires in the Ashland area which formed the Eastern Montana Complex. Timber sale plans are being developed for two of these fire areas.
- The Resource Management Plan is also scheduled to start in 2004. The MCFO has drafted a pre-plan which will go to the state office for review. After the state office review it will be sent to the RAC for their review.
- OHV letters went out for public input and the county commissioners have been briefed regarding signing, education process, etc. We will provide the SD our priority areas for Travel Management planning by December 15
- A thescelosaurus fossil that was found and removed from public land by an unauthorized person (subsequently recovered) has now been preserved for public viewing. A cast of the dinosaur and a display case was constructed by The Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman for the BLM and is currently displayed in the Miles City Field Office lobby.

SWL Discussion/Sage Grouse Discussion, proposal formulation

Becky Kallevig moved that the council members present develop and sign a letter to Director Kathleen Clark and State Director Marty Ott.

The RACs met together the previous day and the EMT RAC broke the SWL into five components/discussion points. They are:

1. Already a law (redundancies)
2. Reserve Common Allotments (issues)
3. Voluntary Allotment – Restructure – Unnecessary

4. Conservation Easements – Omitted
5. Endangered Species Act Mitigation which was changed to Landscape Habitat Improvement (should be included as an option for implementation).

The council worked together, discussed the issues, drafted and signed the following letter:

October 30, 2003

Bureau of Land Management
Kathleen Clarke, Director
5655 MIB
1620 L St NW
Washington, DC 20036

Bureau of Land Management
Marty Ott, State Director
5004 Southgate Drive
Billings, MT 59101

Dear Director Clarke and Director Ott:

It is the consensus of the Eastern Montana RAC that the SWL Initiative not be a priority of the BLM. We feel the SWL concepts could be implemented under existing regulations and laws.

If the BLM continues with this initiative, we offer the following suggestion for each concept:

1. **Conservation Partnerships** - We believe these can be implemented under existing laws (ILRMA).
2. **RCA** - The RCA is not feasible in Montana at this time. However, as a concept, it has merit and should be considered, if necessary, in the future.
3. **Voluntary Allotment Restructure** - The allotment restructuring can be utilized under existing programs.
4. **Conservation Easement** - Before this concept was omitted, the RAC decided not to accept this concept because private property rights could be impacted. As a concept for conservation, it should be retained for future reference and discussion.
5. **Landscape Habitat Initiative** - Landscape Habitat Initiative by permittees is a viable concept (with mutually agreed upon incentives).

The Eastern Montana RAC supports the ongoing National BLM Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy. We recommend continuing coordination with cooperating agencies.

The following budget concerns are Eastern Montana RAC's top priorities: Natural Cultural Resource Law Enforcement, CBM, Resource & Development, and Land Use Planning, Sage Grouse, Recreation, Threatened and Endangered Species, and Public Education.

The Eastern Montana RAC appreciates the opportunity to participate in the formulation of these initiatives utilizing the four Cs – consultation, cooperation, communication and enhancing community-based conservation. However, because the Eastern Montana RAC only meets quarterly, it is imperative we be given ample time to study and respond to national issues presented before us, specifically SWL and fiscal budget 2006.

We want to continue our involvement and would appreciate a formal response from Director Kathleen Clarke.

Sincerely, (Signed by the attending members of the Eastern Montana RAC)

Meeting Evaluation/Wrap-up, Next Mtg Dates, Agenda, etc.

The next meeting has been set for January 14 (evening social) & 15 (meeting), 2004. Tentative agenda items may include:

- CBNG overview, history, current status
- OHV progress update and travel planning priorities
- Billings shooting area sub-committee report
- Weatherman Draw/ACEC extension report, for action by RAC
- SWL Washington Office response letter
- Sage Grouse status report
- Post 2003 recreation/hunting season/Knowlton report
- MCFO RMP Revision Prep. Plan